

A DEVASTATING ACCOUNT OF POVERTY AND EXPLOITATION IN MULK RAJ ANAND'S NOVEL "COOLIE"

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ABSTRACT

Coolie is a devastating account of poverty and exploitation faced not only by Munoo, but thousands like him. Anand shows how the racial and class hierarchies imposed by British Colonialism have intersected or overlaid the existing caste to make life impossible for coolies. The incidents and the situations in the novel reflect the actualities of Indian life of the time at which it was written. This theme is more acute, more pressing and more complicated in today's world, as it has been in those days. Poverty is recurrent theme in the novel Coolie. We have vivid pictures of the wretchedness and misery in the novel.

KEYWORDS: *Coolie, Exploitation, Devastating, Ordeal, Sheer Poverty, Pathos & Protagonist*

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INTRODUCTION

Mulk Raj Anand stands in the front line of Indian writing in English. His depiction of the characters is life-like and he is the perfectionist. He is undoubtedly the greatest artist of Indian writing in English, his great works represent the lives of India's poor in a realistic and sympathetic manner. He clearly points out the living conditions of people like a sweeper, a coolie, a peasant etc. who were exploited by the upper caste people and landlords etc.. Anand's *Coolie* gives a clear picture of downtrodden by Munoo who at his early stage being unaware of what's happening next to his own existence. It is based on sufferings of the saga, of Munoo who performs variegated jobs as a domestic servant, coolie, and rickshaw puller. He struggles a lot in his life for food, shelter, identity and sympathy and finally dies of consumption. Rich people used to look down the poor as worthless, having no existence and significance as human beings. The marginalized often suffer at the hands of the cruel forces in the society of theirs. In the novel, the miserable coolies like Munoo and the like, represent the margin and the capitalist and evil forces stand for the center.

Throughout the novel, Munoo faces humiliation and oppression. In this Novel, people like Ganpet, Daya Ram, Chinta Sahib and others have always despised Munoo. They scorned and abused him. The aim of the novelist in this novel is to illuminate the harsh realities of the society and the ruthless exploitation of the weak. The Novelist has graciously pointed out the epic realities of human situations as they had understood them. However, the novel doesn't aim to picturised life in a dark and gloomy-way and want to stimulated conscience of humanity.

DISCUSSIONS

Coolie is one of the most outstanding novels of Anand. When coolie was written, poverty was even greater evil than it is today. Anand did a great service to the country by writing *Coolie* in which he exposed not only

poverty but also the exploitation of the poor by the rich people. *Coolie* is an exposure of the evil of poverty and suffering which results from poverty. It tells us an interesting and eventful story containing plenty of action and excitement. There are large number of dramatic situations in the story and the story does not become dull or tedious at any point. A lot of suspense is created in our minds in the course of narration of incidents and events. *Coolie* is more like the macro-cosm i. e Indian society; *Coolie* is verily a cross-section of India the visible India mixture of the horrible and the holy, the inhuman and the humane, the sordid and the beautiful. The general effect is panoramic, good and evil being thrown there is not time for us to pause to think, to judge for we are constantly shifted. A new situation engulfs us at every turn, and new cruelties and absurdities whirl round us. The protagonist is a village lad of fourteen and the novel is an account of his experiences in the course of two years of life. During which he travels from place to place in quest of livelihood and some measures of happiness. We first see him in his village where he is dependent upon the charity of his uncle and Aunt because his parents had died when he was yet a child in the village he was himself a victim of his Aunts harshness, and callousness. We can see how aunt Gujiri ill treats him and Anand writes "Munoo ohe Munoo!" she called again exasperated and raising her voice this time, to the highest pitch to which in her anger and hate, she could carry it; where have you died? Where have you gone, you ominous orphan? Come back and began!" Munoo's uncle and Aunt consider him as a machine for obtaining money. Munoo willingly receives his role as a slave and agrees to go to town with his uncle. His pain and powerless can be seen through these lines.

"My uncle Aunt want me to begin earning money," said Munoo,

"I am grown up now and must fend for myself".

Then he left the village. Munoo was not really willing to go to the town because he was quite happy in the village in spite of the fact that his aunt was always abusing him and making him do all kinds of tasks. She often used to beat him. Munoo wanted to go to the town only after completing his education in the local school. He also wanted to acquire some knowledge about machines, before moving to the town. But he had no choice in that matter, he accompanies his uncle, Daya Ram, to the town to Sham Nagar. His uncle Daya Ram was a peon in the imperial Bank in that town and had arranged a job as a domestic servant for the Munoo in the house of his boss, Natho Ram, sub accountant in the imperial Bank. Munoo having no shoes, he was already feeling foot-sore Daya Ram kept urging the boy to walk fast because he did not want to get late for his duties. Munoo liked to get a ride in a bullock-cart, but Daya Ram refused and did not allow the boy to get into it. Munoo had therefore, to continue walking on the out-skirts of the town, Munoo saw a huge animal leaving black smoke and uttering loud voice. Munoo asked his uncle about the animal. His uncle told the boy that it was not an animal but the engine of railway train, near the town Munoo saw sweet shops, balloonstools and ice cream, he felt a strong desire to taste one of the ices but he dared not ask his uncle to buy him one. Munoo saw a gramophone playing. He thinks that a man was singing from inside the box. His uncle told him that it was a machine called a phonogram, which produced the sound. On seeing a bicycle, Munoo was similarly surprised. On reaching the town Munoo felt as if he was walking in a dream in a land of romance where everything was golden and ground. Munoo and Daya Ram soon reached to the office of the boss. The boss directed Daya Ram to take the boy to his house and put in the charge of his wife. Munoo was tired after the long walk through the hills to the town and he was hungry also. Munoo was now suddenly possessed by feeling of sadness and self-pity he had thought that he would be able to get some rest and food on reaching his destination but the customs in towns were different from those in the villages. Munoo spent a most uncomfortable night in Nathoo-Ram's house. Munoo's mistress was an awful woman in Munoo's opinion because she was shouting at Munoo

everytime for his ignorance and his slowness in learning things "Chota Babu" brother of Nathoo Ram was very kind to Manoo he gave Manoo a razor blade and his clothes. In fact he made up his mind to be a good servant a perfect model of a servant because he was an orphan craving for love and he knew that he was inferior to all those person's whom he was serving in the house. Bibi Ji (Nathoo Ram's wife) did not allow Sheela to play with Munoo because she was acutely conscious of her social and economic status and of her superiority over Munoo. Munoo reached to every events which occurs in his life. One afternoon the boss of Babu Nathoo Ram came to tea with Nathoo Ram and his family. On this occasion situation became worse when the tea-tra fell down from Manoo's hands and there was a crash of the crockery on the kitchen floor. Bibi Ji 'Manoo's mistress began to scold and abuse Manoo for having broken the crockery that night. Manoo sobbed and wept a lot before breathlessness and falling asleep. Next day Munoo went to see Daya Ram and asked if he could have a little money but he abused him Daya Ram began to beat Munoo mercilessly for his refusal to eat the food which his employees had offered to him and turned him out of his lodging Munoo hated his uncle, he decided to disappear from this place and go far-away from Bibi Ji and his uncle, but he had no money with him.

After few days Munoo was able to recover his old zest for life and also his old vigour. Munoo slipped out of Babu Nathoo Ram's house in the darkness of evening. He went on walking at a fast pace till he entered the yard of the railway station where he had never been before. He got into a compartment of the train without realizing what he was doing, feeling exhausted and breathless, he lay down in a heap under a seat. Munoo did not know where the train was going, the train was nearing Daultpur. A businessman and his partner Praba Dayal and Ganpat were amazed to find a boy under the seat. Prabha Dayal now began to question Munoo whom he had found under the seat Munoo explained the whole story to prabha Dayal, Prabha had begun to feel deeply sympathetic towards the boy. Lastly, it was decided that they would take Munoo with them. Prahba Dayal was a kind hearted business man and owns a pickle Jam factory there with his partner (Ganpat). Manoo reached to every events which occurs in his life. The orphan boy (Munoo) does various jobs at Daultpu, Bombay and Shimla.

In Daultpur, Munoo begins working as a servant in the factory in which a few other servants where working as well. Prabha and his wife Prabhati are very benevolent persons and they treat Munoo with great kindness; but Ganpat is a very stern and spiteful kind of man who is very harsh towards Munoo and abuses him on one occasion, even gives him a beating Ganpat proves treacherous to Prabha with the unfortunate result that Prabha is reduced to bankruptcy and suffers a nervous break down Prabha has then to leave Daultpur and goes back to his native place in hills. Munoo does not know what to do and where to go. Munoo feels miserable and his comfort lies only in a few words of kindness spoken sometimes by Babu Nathoo Ram's younger brother and the little girl Sheela. Bibi Ji (Nathoo Ram's wife) did not allow Sheela to play with Munoo because she was acutely conscious of her social and economic status and of her superiority over Munoo. The orphan boy Munoo worked at Daultpur, Bombay and Shimla. Munoo is favoured by destiny on many occasions, though the favours of destiny are nullified by the cruelty of society. In the course of the two year's which Munoo spends at various places he undergoes many experiences, most of which are unpleasant, disagreeable and depressing while a few are certainly pleasant, stimulating and cheering. The manner in which he was introduced to us filled us with great expectations about his future but unfortunately those expectations where after-wards sadly falsified, so that at the end we find ourselves sighing and even sobbing over his fate. In this world of materialism the novelist tries to bring the eminence of re-establishment of kindness and compassion, without romanticizing the character of Manoo, who is a person with lot of problems, Anand creates a sense a pity in our minds. His aim is to make us aware of the catastrophe i e capitalism and colonialism prevailing in our society. The devastating account of poverty, suppression, exploitation between rich and poor

is further emphasized when Munoo goes to Shimla where he found two classes of people, the Sahib log's and coolie. There he found life of plenty and luxury on the other hand there was the life of under-employment and over-work. In Shimla, Munoo develops tuberculosis on account of excessive physical strain and stress to which he is subjected as a rickshaw –puller and after sometime he dies in a hospital. Sheer poverty and overwork have killed him. Munoo dies a pre-mature death only because of poverty necessity of having to work too hard. He was not able to save himself from the clutches of tragic death. Death is in a way unreal for Munoo because he has experienced essential oneness with the whole of universe; and in death the tide of his life only moves back to deeps where the artificial compartments of this world have vanished and where all life is one. Munoo had moved through this worldly life an integrating mirror and death for him only means that his soul has now become one with the infinite universe with which it had all along been buying to forge the links of love.

Anand does not directly lecture and summaries to us. He conveys his intentions and suggestions to us indirectly through his pictures of contemporary Indian life. The life of coolies is a life of want and misery. Their struggle for survival is very painful almost heart rending. There are two major sources in the novel one is the account of the poverty of the millions of people in India, and wretchedness and misery which they experience as a result of that poverty; and the second is the account of Munoo's reactions to the adverse circumstances which he has to go through at every stage of life. This novel is a study in destitution; and its effects on our minds is to arouse in us a deep feeling of sympathy for the down trodden and exploited millions of people in the country. The following comment by Ren-shepherd is note-worthy: *"The alienation of his (Anand's) characters like bakha and Munoo is more easily accountable. All of Anand's heroes are typically youthful energetic, sensitive a, and idealistic people possessing an awareness of the follies, injustices, as well as the hypocrisies rampant in a traditional and caste-bound society. Munoo engage our sympathies because he his helpless victim; His personal appeal is the result of an irrepressible vigour and spontaneity despite appalling circumstances; and his alienation is primarily the result of social ostracism."* As we have seen all the people who were responsible for devastation and exploitation of character Munoo were the same. There are plenty of psychological analysis in this novel to lend weight to it and depth to it. In his novels *Coolie*, *Untouchable* and also in other novels of Anand, Munoo appears as a champion of poor, destitute, under-privileged, and the exploited class of Indian Society.

This novel is a genuine and heart-felt objection against the emergence of a new world of materialism, pshysicalism, solitude and apathy, and distinction of class and status. The conditions of life of the working-class in this country have considerably improved in our times and, to that extent, the story of this novel has become obsolete. Anand's purpose in writing this novel was to depict the misery and the wretchedness of the common people and especially of the people in towns and cities in those days, just as it had been his purpose of deal with the social evil of untouchability in the first novel. The dominating tone of novels of Anands is Pathos, though humor is not all together lacking that is the case with both *Untouchable* and *Coolie*.

There is an element of comedy too in his novels and he has an usual talent for describing places and scenes in his novels, Anand generally follows the traditional method of portraying the characters in his novels. In his first novel, *untouchable*, he well made use of the technique of stream of consciousness of the interior monologue. In this novel too, he make use of that technique though he does so chiefly while dealing with Munoo, and very little in other cases. As *Coolie* is a very long novel, Anand has done well in using this technique sparingly, devoting more space and attention to outward action and to dialogue them to an analysis of the thoughts and the feeling of characters. here is a plenty of psychological

analysis in this novel to lend weight and depth to it.

CONCLUSIONS

The novel "coolie" can be called as an epic as it gives a panoramic view of India society, the novel is full of portraits and vignettes of characters showing Anand's wide range of observations of the life and the people of this country in the thirties of the twentieth century, the two important issues highlighted in this novel are the account of poverty of millions of people in India and wretchedness and misery which they experience as a result of due to poverty. Second is the extent of Munoo's reaction to the adverse circumstances which he face's at every stage while dealing with poverty and powerful rich people. The coolie depicts the need of compassion, concern and mercy of the down-trodden and under-yoke sections of the society while bringing the harsh realities of the subjugated people of this country to the limelight. Anand through this novel suggests that a little more empathy and tender heartedness on the part of the society could have turned Munoo into a happy individual and averted his tragic end. Anand has created a tableau of Indian society consisting of rich and poor section's. He has castigated exploiters, tyrants and evil doers. And he has acted as a true lover of realism and humanity, a champion, of the rights of the human beings Moreover coolie ignites the human thinking and arouse the human conscience to feel the pain of the under-privileged and exploited classes of Indian society. The coolie is a stark contrast between hopes and expectations of the people always whorled in adversity and carries an indictment against society as a whole, a society that breeds prejudice, cupidity and cruelty.

The following words of Mulk Raj Anand are noteworthy.

"All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories, were dear to me, because they were the reflection of the real people I had known during my childhood and youth. And I was only repaying the debt of gratitude I owed them for much of the inspiration they had given me to mature into manhood when I began to interpret their lives in my writings. They were not mere phantoms, though my imagination did a great deal to transform them."

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